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Contemporary school-based violence: adolescent female perceptions of identity formation

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2015-09-04
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/18461

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ABSTRACT

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School-based violence has become an international endemic (Boulton, & Smith, 1994; Burton, 2008; Burton & Leoschut, 2012; Gentile, Lynch, Linder, & Walsh, 2004). However, reports and research regarding female-induced violence in schools continues to be overlooked due to a heavy concentration on male-induced violence in general. This study takes up this omission, building upon the findings of nine semi-structured interviews with adolescent females from disadvantaged communities. It contributes to contemporary understandings of how school-based violence has evolved in relation to gendered behaviour, as well as to the understanding of how exposure to violence influences the identity development of South African adolescents. As a result, this study advocates that the contemporary trends of school-based violence and its influences on human development should be understood from a post-modern psychosocial ecological approach. Furthermore, social interventions should also be informed by the current interactions of the various social and ecological systems in which individuals interact and develop. This approach allows for a better understanding of adolescents ability to reason and use social coping strategies to resolve conflict. During this study, the continuous desensitisation of violence and the growing culture of silence toward violence emerged. This illuminated the cultivation of ineffective social skills such as violence. This study concludes that perfomative acts such as gendered violence are guided by social stimuli (Erikson, 1980; Butler, 1999). Therefore, adolescent gendered identities are developed through social interactions between individuals and amongst different social and ecological environments.

Key words: school-based violence, female-induced violence, post-modern identity formation, adolescence, psychosocial ecological approach, performative gendered identities, disadvantaged South African communities